GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:262
ANSWERED ON:07.08.2003
FREE TO AIR CHANNELS WITHOUT SET TOP BOX
IQBAL AHMED SARADGI;MANIKRAO HODLYA GAVIT

Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state:

(a) whether the cable operators in the country have blamed the Union Government for forcibly implementing the Conditional Access System (CAS) in cities;

(b) if so, the details in this regard;

(c) whether the cable operators have refused to provide free to air services at Rs. 72 per month to consumers;

(d) if so, the details and facts thereof;

(e) the reaction of the Union Government to the view of the cable operators;

(f) whether the Prime Minister had also intervened and issued directions to the Ministrythat it should be a consumer-friendly decision; and

(g) the steps proposed, if any, to make available TV programmes to the citizens at affordable cost and restrict mandatory use of Set-Top-Box for free-to-air channels?

Answer

THE MINISTR OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD)

(a) to (g): A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a) TO (g) OF LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 262 FOR ANSWE ON 7TH AUGUST, 2003.

(a): No Sir.

(b): Does not arise.

(c) to (e): Pursuant to the recommendations of the Task Force, the Government has, through issue of a Notification on 7th May, 2003 specified the minimum number of free-to-air channels to be included in the package of channels forming the basic service tier, as thirty, in the four metros. The package of channels forming the basic service tier must include the compulsory transmission of three Doordarshan channels notified under section 8 of the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, the genres of entertainment, news, sports, children`s programmes and music and must be in English, Hindi and regional languages depending on the availability of such channels in the metros. The Government has also specified the maximum amount of Rs. 72/- per month (exclusive of taxes) which a cable operator in the four metros may demand from a subscriber for receiving the programmes transmitted in the basic service tier. Free-to-air channels, over and above the basic service tier would be made available to the subscribers within the said maximum amount. (copy of the Notification available at Ministry`s website www.mib.nic.in).

(f): It is the endeavour of the Government to make the implementation consumer-friendly.

(g): The Set Top Box (STB) is required only for viewing programmestransmitted through pay channels and not for viewing of free-to-air channels.

? CAS has the following advantages for the consumers:-

(i) Subscriber will pay only for the pay channels that he chooses to view.

(ii) He can plan his spending and regulate content watched at home.

(iii) No STB for free-to-air channels.

? The cost to the consumers will be affordable since they will have to pay only for those channels which they view and wish to see.

? The implementation of CAS will be closely monitored by theImplementation Committee comprising representatives ofmulti-system operators (MSOs), broadcasters, cable operatorsetc. They will also interact with the representatives of consumer protection groups and take steps to address their concerns. The STBs will be made available by the MSOs and broadcasters atreasonable and affordable prices. A few MSOs have already announced attractive introductory offers.

? The Cable Television Networks (Amendment) Rules, 1994have been amended by the Government through issue of Notification of 6th June, 2003 (copy available at Ministry`swebsite www.mib.nic.in) which requires that the cable operator shall make provisions for rent and security deposits or refund thereof as well as warranty, repair and maintenance in the manner notified by the Government.

? The Central Board of Excise and Customs in the Ministry ofFinance has also extended the period of customs duty reduction upto 30th September, 2003. Through issue of Notification of24th June, the Central Excise Duty element of 16% has beendispensed with, and this is likely to boost the growth of indigenous industry.